
OLR Bill Analysis

HB 5497 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF HEARING INSTRUMENT SPECIALISTS AND AUDIOLOGISTS.

SUMMARY:

This bill allows a licensed audiologist to fit or sell hearing aids without (1) obtaining additional licensure as a hearing instrument specialist (previously called "hearing aid dealer") or (2) completing additional educational and training requirements. Existing law already includes the fitting or selling of hearing aids within an audiologist's scope of practice (CGS § 20-395a (10)). Audiologists receive training in this function as part of their doctoral degree education and supervised postgraduate work experience.

For registration periods starting October 1, 2014, the bill requires a hearing instrument specialist to complete at least 16 hours of continuing education before the Department of Public Health (DPH) renews his or her biennial license. The continuing education must be completed within the two years preceding license renewal and include courses offered or approved by the National Board of Certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences, American Academy of Audiology, American Speech-Language Hearing Association, or any DPH-approved successor organizations. Current law does not require continuing education as a condition of licensure renewal.

The bill exempts from the continuing education requirements (1) first-time licensure renewal applicants and (2) certain licensees with a medical disability or illness.

The bill also requires a hearing instrument specialist seeking licensure reinstatement after his or her license was voided to submit to

DPH evidence documenting successful completion of eight hours of continuing education within the preceding year.

*House Amendment "A" adds the provisions regarding hearing instrument specialists that (1) create certain exemptions from the continuing education requirements, (2) require licensure renewal applicants to sign a statement and keep records documenting completion of these requirements, and (3) require applicants for licensure reinstatement to document successful completion of eight hours of continuing education.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2012

AUDIOLOGIST REQUIREMENTS FOR FITTING AND SELLING HEARING AIDS

The bill removes the statutory requirement that an audiologist who fits or sells hearing aids:

1. obtain additional licensure as a hearing instrument specialist;
2. provide DPH with evidence showing satisfactory completion of (a) at least six semester hours of coursework in selecting and fitting hearing aids and (b) 80 hours of supervised clinical experience with children and adults in selecting and fitting hearing aids at a program accredited by American Speech Language-Hearing Association, or its successor; or
3. pass the hearing instrument specialist written licensure exam.

HEARING INSTRUMENT SPECIALIST CONTINUING EDUCATION

Compliance

The bill requires a hearing instrument specialist, when applying for license renewal, to sign a statement attesting that he or she has completed the required 16 hours of continuing education. Each licensee must keep attendance records or completion certificates that show compliance with this requirement for at least three years after the date the continuing education was completed. The licensee must submit the records to DPH for inspection within 45 days after the

department requests it.

Waiver

The bill allows the DPH commissioner to waive or extend the deadline for completing the continuing education requirement for a licensee who has a medical disability or illness. The licensee must apply to DPH for such a waiver or extension and submit (1) a licensed physician's certification of the disability or illness and (2) any other documentation DPH requires.

Under the bill, the commissioner may grant a waiver or extension for up to one registration period. But, she may grant additional waivers or extensions if the illness or disability extends beyond that two-year time period and the licensee re-applies.

BACKGROUND***Hearing Instrument Specialists***

A hearing instrument specialist fits and sells hearing aids to individuals in retail establishments. To become licensed, the law requires an applicant to (1) complete a four-year high school course or its equivalent; (2) complete a DPH-approved study course or period in fitting and selling hearing aids; and (3) pass a written, oral, and practical exam (CGS § 20-398(a)).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Program Review and Investigations Committee

Joint Favorable Change of Reference

Yea 10 Nay 0 (03/16/2012)

Public Health Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 24 Nay 0 (03/23/2012)